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ABSTRACT

This bulletin discusses transition programs for youth with disabilities. It outlines features of effective transition programs that have proved to be successful including longitudinal planning, emphasis on careers (not labels), work-based learning, connection to community resources, and sustained involvement of employers. A set of strategies is presented that have been employed by practitioners developing school-to-work transition services for youth with disabilities, which help to ensure that all students are served under the School-to-Work Opportunities Act and that the culmination of every student's education is a job in a chosen career. Strategies include establishing partnerships with schools, clearly defining roles and responsibilities, fostering communication between all partners, using transition specialists to assist partners with program development, promoting student self-determination, focusing on long-term outcomes, setting high standards, and developing social and interpersonal skills of youth with disabilities. A model program, the Youth Transition Program in Oregon, is then described. The bulletin concludes with a list of selected organizations and other resources for information on transition for youth with disabilities. (CR)

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SCHOOL TO WORK OPPORTUNITIES

★RESOURCE BULLETIN

FEBRUARY 1996

Serving Youth with Disabilities Within School-to-Work Systems

Since 1984, when a strong federal policy emphasis on school-to-work transition for youth with disabilities was initiated by the U.S. Department of Education, a great deal has been learned about what it takes to assist these youth to make the transition to adult life successfully. Schools are now increasingly aware of what is required to prepare youth with disabilities, regardless of type or degree of disability, for productive and satisfying employment. Virtually every student with a disability can leave school with a high likelihood of adult employment, given the proper opportunities, guidance, and support. In fact, when work-based learning, especially paid work, is integrated into the curriculum, employment outcomes for students with disabilities approximate those for non-disabled students.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) promotes academic and career development by requiring Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for all youth with disabilities. IEPs outline all the academic services a student will receive, and also must include a transition plan for students aged sixteen and older. Transition plans detail specific programs, activities, and services that address the obstacles that youth with disabilities face as they make the transition to work. The IEP can serve as a model for education and career development plans that are important components of a school-to-work system.

The characteristics of the most successful transition programs for youth with disabilities are strikingly similar to those that are emphasized by the School to Work Opportunities Act. Some of the most important of these characteristics include learning in real work environments, relating classroom education to these real life experiences, linking these educational activities with related programs and services, and connecting students and their families to necessary community resources and supports.

This bulletin starts with an overview of the issues surrounding implementation of services and components proven to be successful. It then presents a set of strategies that have been employed and supported by programs offering transition services for youth with disabilities. Selected organizations and other resources for further information on such services are then provided.

Features of Effective Transition Programs

The items outlined below are a few of the more important features of effective transition programs for youth with disabilities, identified after more than a decade of research and demonstration.

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Longitudinal Planning. It has long been recognized that there is wisdom in beginning early to plan for a viable career path and to identify opportunities for career exploration, assessment, and work-based opportunities. In fact, this recognition led to the legal requirement, under IDEA, to incorporate transition planning into the IEP for students in special education as early as age fourteen. Long-term planning is most effective when it is actively influenced by students, as well as their families or other significant adults.

Emphasizing Careers, Not Labels. When school-to-work programs are organized according to the interests and aptitudes of each individual student, rather than by disability or categorical label, students tend to achieve better employment outcomes. Opportunities for peers, with and without disabilities, to interact with and learn from one another increase. By organizing career preparation around industry clusters, or "career majors," schools increase the post-school success for all students.

Work-based Learning. Work-based learning includes career exploration, assessment, job shadowing, internships, and paid work experiences at employer work sites. The more opportunities available, the more successful the student is likely to be in postsecondary employment. Paid work is an especially critical component of educational curricula. Regardless of disability type or degree, students are significantly more likely to be employed as adults if they have engaged in real, paid work while in high school.

Connection to Community Resources. The non-work life needs of students can significantly influence their eventual adult employment. Family support, living arrangements, income, peer interactions, and other circumstances can significantly affect post-school outcomes. Student success is often contingent on linking students to necessary ancillary community resources that address these circumstances.

Sustained Involvement of Employers. Employers are willing to invest time and resources in workplace learning activities so long as they perceive direct benefit. The motivation of employers to participate in transition programs must go far beyond corporate good citizenship. Opportunities to influence curriculum, directly train prospective employees in the intricacies of their industry, and receive effective consultation in workforce preparation are just a few of the possible benefits. Effective transition programs create these opportunities with employers as indispensable partners and valuable customers.

Strategies for Serving Youth with Disabilities

The following strategies have been employed by practitioners developing school-to-work transition services for youth with disabilities. They help ensure that all students are served under the School-to-Work Opportunities Act, and that the culmination of every student's education is a job in a chosen career.

Partnerships with Schools. Programs for youth with disabilities work best when treated as part of the existing school-to-work system. Considering them to be set-aside programs may prevent youth from reaching their fullest potential by limiting their range of options. Full integration within the school offers youth with disabilities access to the same range of services and opportunities provided to *all* students, and promotes their integration into the mainstream education system.

Clearly Defined Roles and Responsibilities. Parents, teachers, counselors, service providers, and students themselves should be equal partners in the development of both the IEP and the transition plan

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that together serve as a blueprint for identifying needed school-to-work opportunities. Once IEPs are completed, the roles and responsibilities of each partner for specific components of a school-to-work program should be clearly defined.

Fostering Communication Between All Partners. Under school-to-work, representatives from different sectors work together to develop IEPs. This is particularly important when serving youth with disabilities, because keeping all members of the IEP team in continual contact with each other allows parents, teachers, counselors, service providers, and students to understand how their responsibilities fit with other program components. This strategy, in addition to creating a more coordinated training system and preventing the duplication of services, helps to foster understanding, engagement, and support from all partners.

Transition Specialists. Within school-to-work programs, career guidance and counseling helps students identify the career options open to them within different industries and occupations, and the educational background they would require to succeed in these occupations. Experienced transition specialists serve the same function for youth with disabilities by assisting partners with program development. As youth with disabilities continue to enter the workplace at an increasing rate, businesses will require assistance in adapting their workplaces to meet the needs of these youth, teachers will have to learn how to teach advanced skills to youth with disabilities while holding them to high standards, and parents must be taught how to help their children take advantage of this wider range of options.

Student Self-determination. Youth with disabilities should be actively involved in creating their IEP and transition plans in order to ensure relevant coursework, career exploration, work-based learning opportunities and, in the end, improved student achievement and performance. This further promotes the belief that school-to-work is most effective when individual planning and career development activities are considered. Making student preferences the central focus of programs serving youth with disabilities allows them to take an active role in planning their own future and lets them explore a broader range of career and life options. This helps to guide them through the process of weighing options while making difficult and important decisions, building their self-esteem, and developing their ability to live and work independently.

Long-term Outcomes. School-to-work views education and training as a developmental continuum, not as an unrelated series of one-year programs. Services for youth with disabilities, however, often focus only on short-term progress, with assessments and decisions typically based on one year's performance. The introduction of the transition plan into the IEP can help reverse this trend by requiring that all members of the youth's transition team consider how services today will apply to the workforce demands of tomorrow.

Set High Standards. For school-to-work to be successful, high standards must guide transition programming, and be used to assess individual and program performance. Low standards limit the range of school, work, and life experiences available to youth, and prevent them from reaching their fullest potential. School-to-work programs should offer the same opportunities and choices to youth with disabilities that are available to all other youth, ranging from high technology to manufacturing industries.

Social and Interpersonal Skills. School-to-work recognizes the array of social and interpersonal skills required for success. School-to-work programs should enable youth with disabilities to develop skills that allow them to become actively engaged in all aspects of community life and continue

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to focus on lifelong learning and social integration. Examples include helping students to develop communication skills through classroom presentations and group projects, or providing learning experiences that allow students to work in teams.

Effective Practices

Oregon's Youth Transition Program (YTP) is a comprehensive, state-wide initiative geared toward improving the post-school and life successes of its participants. Started as a seven site demonstration project in 1990, YTP has expanded to 26 sites across the state and served more than 1,000 youth through 1995. Over one-half of all participants are youth with disabilities, and many others are at-risk or have encountered a variety of obstacles to successful post-school transition.

Designed and overseen at the state level, but implemented and operated at the district and local level, YTP shows how the strategies discussed in this bulletin can promote successful outcomes for youth with disabilities. Central to the success of YTP has been its ability to identify clear roles for each partner in the transition process. The key stakeholders of YTP are the Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation Division (OVRD), the State Department of Education, the University of Oregon, schools and school districts, employers, parents, and students. Not only have roles been clearly defined, but communication between each partner has been continual. This has created more coordinated and better defined services, and has helped avoid duplication of services. One of the unique features of the program is the ongoing training and technical assistance provided to local practitioners by the University of Oregon.

YTP sites are funded by the OVRD, which is also involved in the screening and selection of participants. Once youth are selected for participation, they and their parents become actively involved in developing a student's individualized education program and transition plan. Teachers, transition specialists, and vocational rehabilitation counselors are also part of the planning team. Student participation ensures that services incorporate student needs and interests, and allows youth to have a voice in determining their future. Other team members guarantee that services build upon one another, and that proper short- and long-term goals and outcomes are used as benchmarks.

Employers have also grown enthusiastic about their participation in YTP. This is partly due to transition specialists, who work closely with employers to foster stronger links between the workplace and school, and to ensure that job requirements match the skills being developed in the classroom. One result of this collaboration has been that schools and employers have increased expectations of youth and promote higher standards.

YTP has also developed independent living and interpersonal skills. Off-site apartments allow youth to focus on cooking, cleaning, financial responsibility, and other living skills, while interacting with their peers on a more social basis. This helps to build self-esteem and has translated into improved confidence on the job and in interacting with others. Compared with other youth with disabilities, YTP participants have exhibited tremendous successes. Relative to non-YTP peers, they are more likely to earn more, be competitively employed, have a stronger sense of self-esteem, and identify the relevance of school.

For further information, contact Dr. Michael Benz, Associate Professor, University of Oregon, 175 College of Education, 5260 University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403-5260 ★ 541-346-1408.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THIS TOPIC, CONSULT THE FOLLOWING ORGANIZATIONS AND JOURNALS:

Organizations

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) advocates for appropriate governmental policies, sets professional standards, provides continual professional development, advocates for newly and historically underserved individuals with exceptionalities (students with disabilities and/or the gifted), and helps professionals obtain conditions and resources necessary for effective professional practice. CEC's **Division on Career Development and Transition** focuses specifically on transition and school-to-work-related issues. 1920 Association Drive, Reston, VA 22091-1589 ★ 703-620-3660; 703-264-9494 (TTY).

The Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) is a membership organization composed of the chief administrators of rehabilitation agencies in the United States, District of Columbia, and United States territories. CSAVR provides information and technical assistance to its membership, which serves people with physical and mental disabilities. 1055 Thomas Jefferson Street, NW, P.O. Box 3776, Suite 401, Washington, DC 20007 ★ 202-638-4634.

The ERIC Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education responds to requests for information on special/gifted education and produces publications on current research, programs, and practices. 1920 Association Drive, Reston, VA 22091 ★ 800-328-0272; 703-264-9474 (in DC area); 703-264-9449 (TTY) ★ ericec@inet.ed.gov.

The Institute on Community Integration (ICI) at the University of Minnesota is dedicated to improving the quality and community awareness of professional services and social supports available to individuals with disabilities and their families. ICI achieves this through interdisciplinary professional education, technical assistance, applied research, and information dissemination. ICI's **National Transition Network** serves as an information center for publications and other materials surrounding the transition from school to work for America's youth, and can provide detailed information on state and local transition initiatives. 102 Pattee Hall, 150 Pillsbury Drive SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455 ★ 612-624-6300; 612-624-4848 (TDD).

The Job Accommodation Network (JAN) is an international toll-free consulting service that provides information on job accommodation and the employability of people with functional limitations. JAN offers instant access to the most comprehensive and up-to-date information about methods, devices, and strategies that can help persons with disabilities in seeking employment. P.O. Box 6123, Morgantown, WV 26506-6123 ★ 800-526-7234; 800-526-4698 (in WV) ★ jan@jan.icdi.wvu.edu.

The National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Inc. (NASDSE) is a not-for-profit corporation which promotes and supports education programs serving youth with disabilities. NASDSE meets this mission through expanding the capabilities of state education agencies to ensure successful outcomes for individuals with disabilities, providing leadership on the development of disability-related policies, and providing information pertaining to the education of individuals with disabilities. 1800 Diagonal Road, King Street Station 1, Alexandria, VA 22314 ★ 703-519-3800.

The National Center for Research in Vocational Education (NCRVE) provides research and information on all aspects of work-related education. NCRVE often features publications and studies that focus on services for youth with disabilities. University of California at Berkeley, 2150 Shattuck Avenue, Suite 1250, Berkeley, CA 94720-1674 ★ 800-762-4093; 510-642-4004 (in CA) ★ AskNCRVE@vocserve.berkeley.edu.

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The National Clearinghouse on Postsecondary Education for Individuals with Disabilities (HEATH Resource Center) is an information exchange center on educational support services, policies, procedures, adaptations, and opportunities available for youth with disabilities making the transition to adult life. One Dupont Circle, Suite 800, Washington, DC 20036-1193 ★ 800-544-3284 (Voice/TDD); 202-939-9320 (in DC area).

The National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICHCY) is a clearinghouse for information on disabilities and disability-related issues. NICHCY also provides technical assistance and offers advice to any person interested in or affected by disability-related issues. P.O. Box 1492, Washington, DC 20013-1492 ★ 800-999-5599; 703-893-6061 (in DC area); 703-893-8614 (TDD) ★ nichcy@capcon.net.

The National Rehabilitation Information Center (NARIC) is a national disability and rehabilitation library and information center that collects and disseminates the results of **National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research**-funded projects, which include books, journal articles, and audiovisuals. In addition, information specialists provide customized database searches of NARIC's various information databases. 8455 Colesville Road, Suite 935, Silver Spring, MD 20910 ★ 800-346-2742 (Voice/TT) ★ naric@capaccess.org.

The National Transition Alliance for Youth with Disabilities (NTA), a consortium of organizations, promotes the transition of youth with disabilities toward gainful employment, postscondary education and training opportunities, and independent living. Alliance members provide technical assistance to personnel who provide transition services, particularly those who work on planning and implementing school-to-work systems and model transition programs funded by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. Transition Research Institute at Illinois, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 113 Children's Research Center, 51 Gerty Drive, Champaign, IL 61820 ★ 217-333-2325.

The Rehabilitation Resource develops, publishes, and disseminates print and visual materials on the topic of vocational rehabilitation to both vocational rehabilitation and educational personnel. Stout Vocational Rehabilitation Institute, University of Wisconsin-Stout, Menomonie, WI 54751 ★ 715-232-1342 ★ fryr@uwstout.edu.

The Transition Research Institute (TRI) at the University of Illinois provides information and assistance to transition programs serving individuals with disabilities. TRI covers such areas as evaluation design, management, instrumentation, data collection and analysis, and information dissemination. Assistance is provided by phone, electronic mail, published materials, workshops, and site visits. College of Education, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 113 Children's Research Center, 51 Gerty Drive, Champaign, IL 61820 ★ 217-333-2325.

Journals

American Rehabilitation. A quarterly journal that discusses vocational rehabilitation in medical, social, and employment contexts. Available from Rehabilitation Services Administration, 330 C Street, SW, Room 3212, Washington, DC 20202-2531 ★ 202-205-8296.

Career Development for Exceptional Individuals. A bi-annual publication devoted to career development for individuals with exceptional characteristics and needs. Available from Division on Career Development and Transition, The Council for Exceptional Children, 1920 Association Drive, Reston, VA 22091-1589 ★ 703-620-3660; 703-264-9494 (TTY).

The Journal of The Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps. A quarterly journal focusing on services and strategies that help persons with severe handicaps function more effectively at home, in the workplace, and in the community. Available from The Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps, 29 West Susquehanna Avenue, Suite 210, Baltimore, MD 21204 ★ 410-828-8274; 410-828-1306 (TTY).

Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation. A quarterly journal dedicated to research in vocational rehabilitation. Available from Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, Box 2011, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, VA 23284 ★ 804-828-1851.

Transition Summary. A yearly publication discussing the transition from school to employment and adult life for youth with disabilities. Available from National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities, P.O. Box 1492, Washington, DC 20013-1492 ★ 800-999-5599; 703-893-6061 (in DC area); 703-893-8614 (TDD).

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